The Quarantined Bridegroom

The Black Cat

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July 1900

The Gaikwar's Sword.
$500 Prize Story.
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The Unmaking of Mr. Lynch.
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The Quarantined Bridegroom.
$150 Prize Story
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The Dancing Goddess.
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The Shortstory Publishing Co., Boston, Mass.

The Black Cat

A Monthly Magazine of Original Short Stories.

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No. 58. JULY, 1900. 5 cents a copy. 50 cents a year.

Entered at the Post-Office at Boston, Mass., as second-class matter.

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The Gaikwar's Sword.*

BY H. S. CANFIELD.

THE recently cabled statement from Paris, that the wondrous sword of the Gaikwar of Baroda forms a part of the East Indian exhibit at the French Exposition, gives some amusement to a slender, dark man, named Jack Revel, born in the Bayou Têche country of Louisiana, with Spanish, French and English strains in him, and having just now no permanent address. He is a good rider and a good shot, and, as is the case with a good many people of his blood, an expert with the foils, grafting something of Italian floridness upon the quiet American method and possessing, in particular, one peculiar lunge taught him by a Sicilian smuggler of cigars, who was killed in Havana harbor five years ago.

In a narrow alley, paved with cobblestones, that branches from Royal Street in the old quarter of New Orleans, is the shop of Juan Garza, a Spanish armorer. He is the only man in this country who has the secret of the Toledo blades, and, therefore, works only when he feels like it. In the same alley lived Constantin, the

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* The writer of this story received a cash prize of $300 in THE BLACK CAT story contest ending March 31, 1900.

Greek jeweller, a handicraftsman from his finger-tips to his eyebrows, who hated machinery and had gone into the quiet part of the town to get rid of the whir and smoke of it. He was a small, silent man, spending most of his time in a back room, where a blow-pipe was, and a forge, along with some queer tools. He looked up and as Revel entered, said:

"Your time is here, I see. Sit down."

"What do you mean?" Revel asked.

"I know men, and I know you. You have something in your face. What is it?"

"Are you rich?" was the counter-question.

"So-so! So-so! Why?"

"No man is so rich that he does not wish to be richer. You can make a quarter of a million if you have the courage. You have the skill, I know."

The Greek rose slowly. As he did so it was to be seen that he was slightly bald and had a drooping moustache of snow-white. Evidently a man past fifty years old. He shut the door leading into the front room.

"It is safer so," he said. "To make a quarter of a million suddenly presupposes something that other people should not hear. How is it to be done?"

In answer Revel handed him a letter. When he had finished he handed it back and sat for a moment musing.

"I have heard of this brother of yours. They know him among the islands of the Ægean. So he is dead at last. And you wish me to do what?"

Revel leaned forward and spoke slowly:

"I am going after the sword, and I want you with me. You do not speak Hindustanee, but I speak five dialects of it. You can be a deaf mute, if you choose. You will be my valet. We will stay six months — or a year, if necessary. You must get sight of the weapon not once, but often. You must duplicate its hilt and scabbard in paste gems. The letter gives the dimensions. Garza can make a dummy in a week. The Gaikwar's sword is worth — "

"Tut, tut!" Constantin broke in. "I know all about the Gaikwar's sword. There is scarcely a working jeweller in the world who does not know of it. It was made in the fourteenth

century and remains — as it has remained for four hundred years — one of the chief expressions of our art. Its value, according to present rates, exclusive of the gold of its scabbard, is nearly £230,000 sterling, about $1,150,000 in your money. Formerly it was worth more, but one large blue diamond is gone from the upper part of the hilt. That diamond was cut to bits in Amsterdam more than a century back, and its parts are not traceable of course. It was worth, uncut, $50,000. The most valuable stones employed in the adornment of the weapon are pigeon-bloods, and they are especially difficult to imitate. Look! I have even two drawings of the sword, one with the blade scabbarded, the other with the blade bare. The Sword of Swords is an old matter of discussion among men of the craft. Your brother is the nineteenth man who has lost his life trying to loot it. You will be the twentieth."

Revel looked at the drawings. They were done in colored inks on parchment, and the artist had been painstaking.

"I should like to borrow them for Garza," he said. "They would help him much."

"No," said the Greek, "they remain with me; but Garza may come here each day — or twenty times a day — and I will show them to him."

"You could not make a duplicate of the gems from this work?" asked Revel.

"Of course not. I would be forced to study the sword."

"Well, then, come and study it."

Constantin's eyes were glittering. "Have you no scruples?" he asked, to gain time. He smiled as he asked it.

"Not a scruple. This Indian potentate does not differ from others, I guess. That is to say, he smokes opium and maintains a harem and grinds his people and drinks more than is good for him. Moreover, he keeps these gems locked up when they should be beautifying beautiful women. It is so much of the tangible wealth of the world he is hiding. Why, it would be praiseworthy to deprive him of them. They are like the miser's gold. He gets no good from them, and no pleasure save from the knowledge that he has them."

The Greek laughed soundlessly. "It is easy to see," he said,

"that you have had religious training and that your intentions are honorable. How much?"

"Eh?"

"How much? How much do I get? I make the false jewels; I furnish the drawings to Garza; I am your valet; I am deaf and dumb; I shall have to stain myself with walnut juice, and that makes the skin sore. How much do I get?"

"The idea is mine," Revel responded, sturdily. "I finance the expedition; I obtain introduction to the Gaikwar's court; I make it possible to you to do the work. In case of detection, the risk is all mine, for who would suspect a dumb servant? My life — not yours — will be set upon the cast. Whatever the outcome, you can always make your way back to your shop here and resume swindling people in detail. When the sword is broken up and the jewels sold, I will give you $300,000, which is more than a fourth of the value. And I will not give you a cent more."

For five minutes the Greek sat with his small figure humped upon the stool and his eyes downcast. Then he looked up suddenly:

"Go bring Garza to look at the drawings," he said.

. . . . . .

The city of Baroda, capital of the dependency of Baroda, stands upon the Biswamintri River, two hundred and thirty-one miles north of Bombay. In the summer of 1898 the British Resident got leave of absence because his liver was bad. The Hon. Montacute Jerrold, six months out from England, took his place. The Hon. Montacute blarsted the blimed country ferociously, but had to stick at his post. The Gaikwar was — and is — a short, fat man, very dark for an upper-caste Indian, with a harem of seventy inmates, a black beard trimmed to a point and an admirable liking for pale ale. His treasure chamber is beneath the palace. It is a room of rock and is guarded day and night by details of six men. They were headed by the eunuch Mussach, who — by common report — was not a eunuch at all, but a big powerful man-at-arms, exercising a stern command over the Gaikwar himself.

To the Residency came that summer, with letters from the sixth underling of the Viceroy, Monsieur le Vicomte Bonnefoi de Têche,

a man of means and a globe-trotter. He had a single servant, a Hindoo deaf-mute, and — for a globe-trotter — much baggage. He was interested in Baroda and exploited a theory that it was the starting point of the Aryan emigration. He was writing a book about this and required time in which to complete his data. Although a literary man, Monsieur the Vicomte was a remarkable shot with pistol, rifle, or double-barrel, played a remarkable game of billiards and fenced remarkably like a professional master-of-arms. The Hon. Montacute Jerrold came of a military family and had no mean skill with steel, but the Vicomte played with him, whether the weapon were rapier, broadsword, foil or schlager. This Frenchman's head was made of wood and his stomach of sheet-iron, so that brandy "pegs" and such things were as weak tea to him. He got uncomfortable quarters in the town, but it was only natural that one so gifted should be asked to share the Residence, now almost deserted. It may have been accident, or it may have been due to expressed preference for quiet and water, but the suite assigned to him was at the top of the house and overlooked the river. A balcony jutted out from it. The Honorable Montacute was a good fellow, if a little dull, and permitted his guest to make himself much at home. In addition to his other virtues, the Frenchman spoke English without trace of accent, played the guitar with the touch of a Spaniard and possessed a clear and plaintive tenor, which, when well moistened, came out strong in love ditties. Skilful as he was, however, his desire for universal conquest led to his undoing. In an evil moment, having thrice disarmed his adversary in five minutes, he said that he was the better oarsman. The challenge was accepted promptly and the boats procured. The greater strength of the Englishman told and the Vicomte was beaten by ten lengths in the mile. Nothing daunted, he essayed the race again and again, and really developed a creditable speed. The boats remained moored close to the Residence and the oars were left in them.

The Gaikwar was more than approachable; he was social. A new face was pleasing, and here was a person who could not only tell him European tales surpassing in dramatics and sensuousness anything within the invention of Montacute, but could also drink more pale ale than any three men in the principality. Every

day the ruler came puffing to the Residence, accompanied sometimes by ten, sometimes by no attendants. Every day he listened to the story-telling, heard the guitar and tried to cue his ball twice in the same way. So it happened that once he found the friends, helmeted and padded, going through broadsword exercise. This delighted the little man, who, like other little men, longed for excellence in athletics.

"You have a wonderful wrist, Vicomte," he said, "and a wonderful eye. That last sweep was tremendous. You are fond of swords, of course."

"Measureably so, your Highness. I have seen some valuable weapons."

"Where?" was the eager question.

"Why, in many places. There is a sword owned by a Spanish grandee in Seville, which, although of steel throughout, is worth twenty times its weight in gold because of its exquisite temper. It is of Toledo make and is a heavy weapon. Then at Teheran I was permitted to look upon the sword of the Shah, set with precious stones and by far the most costly in the world."

On a table at the Gaikwar's elbow was a tall glass, just filled with ale, and he drained it at a gulp. "Did you say the most valuable in the world?" he asked.

"I did, your Highness."

"You mean the most valuable you have seen."

"I mean," with a touch of impatience, "the most valuable in the world."

The Presence rose, its turban slightly awry, and stood with short legs wide apart, stomach protruding and arms akimbo.

"Boh!" he said. "Boo! Bah! The Shah's sword is a trinket, a bauble, a thing of yesterday. It is nothing — nothing. I have the Pride of the World. Come, I will show it to you!"

It was forenoon and his ninth glass of ale, and he staggered slightly as he marched pompously to the door. The Vicomte and Montacute followed at his heels. As they passed along the hall the Frenchman whistled absently three bars from the "Tower Song" of "Trovatore," then apologized. The Gaikwar waved him aside with a puffy black hand.

"It is nothing," he said graciously. "I sometimes whistle."

They entered the palace by a small door so cunningly set in its side that it was visible only when they stood directly in front of it. His Highness had four attendants with him on this occasion, but made no bones of producing a key. As he did so, something like a wink disturbed his left eyelid. He led the way down a flight of steps which dropped ten feet below the level ground, strolled along a rock-paved passage between walls of marble, turned into a similar passage and, twenty feet further on, brought up against a door six inches thick and swinging upon brass hinges a yard long. On either side of it were three men, armed with swords and old-fashioned muskets of rusty and dilapidated look. The Gaikwar dispatched one of them for Mussach. Five minutes later the party saw swinging along the passage a man six feet, four inches high, and of great breadth. His face, dark as an Ethiopian's, was smoothly shaven. His lips were thin, the nose aquiline, eyes small, bright and close together, forehead low and bulging. From the sides of his cropped head huge ears projected. A plain sword was strapped to his side, and he bore in one hand a large key, attached to his girdle with a stout chain of steel. Without speaking, or any obeisance, he opened the door, setting his bulk against it and causing it to squeak dolefully. At this moment there was the sound of rapid footsteps behind them, and, turning, they saw Ali Dass, the deaf-mute, who bore his master's coat, which he presented with a bow. The Vicomte watched his twisting fingers for a moment, then said: —

"He saw me leave the house, and thought I would do more honor to the Presence if I were better clad. I don't want the coat; can't wear it over this jacket in fact; but since he is here, he would as well come in, would he not?"

"Certainly! certainly!" the Gaikwar answered, a little thickly. "Come on!"

The Vicomte saw the small eyes of Mussach resting on him attentively, and, as he walked down the passage, felt those eyes boring into the small of his back. The hall in which they now found themselves led straight for fifty feet, crooked thrice at right angles, and debouched suddenly into a circular chamber, hewn in the solid rock. Ranged halfway around it were wooden boxes, in various stages of dustiness, and all locked. On the far side stood

a chest a yard high, at least six feet long, and very narrow. It was of teak, banded with copper, and its corners were sheathed with the same metal. Its lid was elaborately carved and scrolled, the central figure representing a cobra charming a bird. The Gaikwar drew a small, flat key of gold, detached it from a chain looped about his neck, placed it in a tiny aperture that showed evenly with the surface of the wood, turned it and threw back the top, which came up lightly. The attendants had been provided with lamps which seemed, from the strong odor thrown off, to be filled with balsam. Their flame was pure and steady, and the men held them high as they grouped about the chest.

From out that narrow receptacle, lined an inch deep with black velvet, burst a glow, a steady glare, broken here and there into quivering points of flame and of a brilliancy to make the eyeballs ache. At first the effect was of a motionless light, like a section of sun. As the vision became accustomed to the iridescence, however, it was seen that the glow was composed of innumerable tiny, wavering, darting, glittering fires, each having its home in the heart of a jewel. Diamonds, white, blue and black, were crusted in masses upon the great hilt near to its upper end. Further down, a belt of sapphires, two inches wide, was wrapped about the handle. Below them yellow topazes gleamed, and, next to the yellow, emeralds, of dark, translucent green, most wonderful to see, showed sparkling and cool. The lower part of the sword handle and all of its guard were taken up with rubies of the true hue, seeming like gouts of blood ablaze. They were laid on without regard to regularity of size. Here a section, inches long, would be covered with stones of less than four carats weight; there a great knob would rise, made of one priceful pebble, bearing in its core a stab of flame as though a candle had been lighted in it. One side of the scabbard, the uppermost, was divided into equal lengths of diamonds, rubies and emeralds. Upon the velvet sides of the chest strange gleams played, as the lamps wavered in the unsteady hands of the attendants. The men had seen this sword many times, but hunger for it, and awe of its unholy, unearthly beauty was in their eyes. Even the Gaikwar had grown slightly pale; yet there was pride in him, too, as he stooped and with his right hand turned over the long weapon, revealing the

under side. The hilt was a replica of that which they had seen, but the scabbard was sown with parallel lines of topazes, sapphires, amethysts, garnets, cornelians, pearls, catseyes, tigereyes, turquoises, opals, carbuncles, onyx and Egpytian jasper.

The Gaikwar drew the sword from its starry sheath and held it extended in both hands. It was heavy for his flabby muscles and hung drooped. The lights played along a blade of polished steel, smooth and deviceless. Upon his wrists were shifting reflections, many-colored, from the gems.

"Ha!" he said. "M. le Vicomte, will you say to your friends hereafter that you have seen the Shah's sword at Teheran?"

The Frenchman bowed. "Your Highness," he answered, his vivid dark eyes resting on the weapon, "the Shah's sword is henceforward a thing unseen. It is a mere trooper's sabre, rusty and dull."

The ruler of Baroda returned the blade to its sheath and deposited his treasure in the chest. The lid was brought down and locked and the gold key carefully fastened upon its chain. No one had noticed the mute, who stood in shadow. He had glanced but once at the sword, then withdrawn further into the darkness. As the party sought the outer hallway, Mussach walked in front of the Vicomte and was ill-mannered enough to turn more than once and look at him intently. The French traveller measured him also, and his eye seemed to rest almost affectionately on one point of the burly throat, just above the hollow at its base.

That night, in the suite which looked over the dark river, the mute found his voice and said:

"The thing is done when you find the secret passage. I tell you that there is one. I discovered a stone which rang hollow. There is a cavity beneath it. In fact, it is a trap-door, though there is no ring in it. The egress is certainly unknown to any one save to the Gaikwar and, probably, to his man Friday. There is not a treasure-chamber in the East which has not a secret exit; it would be valueless otherwise. If a ruler's palace is captured, he must have some way of escape with his riches. This exit probably runs to the river. It must be your part to find it. The gold key of the Gaikwar, strangely enough, is fashioned upon the 'Yale' principle, and, of a surety, the lock is strong. You will

have to take two impressions of that key in wax, or, better still, bring it to me and I will photograph it."

"I'll get the key," his companion replied, with a chuckle, "unless the Gaikwar has reformed suddenly. How about the sword itself and the jewels?"

"The duplicate made by Garza is exact in size and shape, and probably is exact in weight also. As to the jewels, I have enough, I think. I may have to reproduce some of the larger ones. It will be additional labor, but no difficulty. I did not work for Bourguignon in Paris for nothing. I have the Cassius purple for the rubies, any quantity of strass for the diamonds, and oxides for the colored gems. The furnace is all right, too. How long before the return of this fool Englishman's superior? He might take it into his head to examine your letters."

"Six weeks."

"It is enough. Get me the key and find the passage. The rest is easy."

The Vicomte went nightly on the river. He worked carefully, to avoid observation, keeping to the centre of the stream mostly and paddling lazily, but foot by foot managed to explore the bank. Thirty yards above the palace, at a point below a ruined summer pavilion of brick, he found an orifice three feet high. Here there was a ledge of rock, sticking out under the water to the distance of a yard, giving firm foothold to a man standing on it. He made his way through a narrow tunnel, finding that it ran gradually upward, until his head came against a smooth, hard surface. Pushing steadily and strongly, he felt the surface give. He raised his hands, shifted the slight weight to one side, and knew, from the change of air, that he stood with his head in the pitch-black of the treasure-chamber. The stone was replaced and he made his way back to the boat, having fastened it with an anchor to the bank.

Two weeks afterward, having watched a peculiarly lengthy and interesting broadsword bout — a bout in which the Englishman, for a while, seemed to hold his own — the Gaikwar swallowed his tenth glass and slept heavily. He made oath upon every god in his calendar that he had but ten. When he woke it was afternoon. He had a slight headache and his mouth was furry. Montacute woke at almost the same instant and stretched himself.

"Ah," he said, "we have had a great snooze. Cricky, what a head I've got!"

"I, too," said his guest, sitting up and rubbing his eyes. "The headache comes from the beastly weather. What do you say to a hair of the dog?"

Under the strengthening influence of more ale, the Gaikwar trotted homeward. Next day Mussach came with news that the ruler was still indisposed, but would be glad to meet the Frenchman at chess on the following evening. Again the supposed eunuch looked hard at the Vicomte, and his dark face wore a puzzled expression as if he were trying to remember something. Again the traveller's gaze wandered for a moment to the point just above the hollow at the base of the bull neck.

At one o'clock in the morning of the 23rd day of September two men swung down a rope-ladder which stretched from the balcony of the British Residence to a narrow, sharp-prowed boat resting in the stream below. One of them bore a long, swathed object strapped to his back. The other wore a sword. The unburdened man placed the oars gently in the row-locks and the craft moved up the stream, hugging the left bank. There was no moon and the stars were hidden by a haze. They came to anchor in the shadow of the ruined summer-house, stepped into the water without hesitation, then disappeared into the bank, the man who had rowed leading the way. Three minutes afterward they stood in the treasure-chamber, which seemed chill. The smaller man shivered so that his teeth chattered. The other struck a match and drew from under his coat a dark lantern. He flashed it about the chamber, then centered its rays on the chest. In a moment his companion had unlocked the receptacle, unrolled his bundle, lifted out the great sword and replaced it with one of like size and contour, flashing in the glare with equal lustre. The chest was closed and locked. He stooped and wrapped the treasure in a sheet of oiled silk. Then, without warning, the chamber was filled with strong light and Mussach stood near them, bearing a lamp in his hand. He stared at them with a savage smile, set the lamp on the stone flooring and half turned to the aperture by which he had entered. Then he seemed to alter his intention and once more faced them.

"Ha!" he said to the taller of the two. "You have shaved your beard; I know you now. You are the dead thief's brother. I have watched your house for a month past. I saw you enter the boat. I would have called the guard, but that I wanted the pleasure of killing you with my own hands as I killed him."

In answer Revel drew his sword. It was of Garza's make, and, as he pressed the point of it upon the flagging, the thin blade bent into a semicircle, then sprang back as the pressure was released.

"You are a brave man," he said simply, with his eyes on the black's throat. "But I would kill you now if there were not a jewelled sword in the world. On guard!"

Mussach, still smiling, stepped widely a pace to the left, to clear the lamp, and drew a straight blade of extraordinary length. It was double-edged and its guard was of broad, thick brass. He did not raise it for a stroke, but threw himself into perfect position, his right foot well forward, the knee slightly bent, his weight resting on the left foot, his long left arm extended behind him, acting as a balance. The Greek shrunk against the wall. Upon the issue of the combat his own life depended, and he was gray in terror.

With a steady rasp the blades met and slipped along each other. For a full minute there was no lunge. It was a test of strength and suppleness of wrist. Revel, his dark, clear-cut face set and slightly flushed, held the yellowish eyes of his opponent, changed from carte to tierce, half-lunged and sprang back. Mussach remained impassive. His steady sword had not wavered an inch during the feinting. The adventurer once more laid his light weapon along the stiff steel and, with a lightning motion of the wrist, cut straight down, turning his point outward slightly to avoid the brass guard. It is an unusual stroke, but was parried smoothly, and in return there was a vicious lunge, caught just in time and sent past within an inch of the breast. Then the battle was on in earnest. Lunge and parry, parry and lunge followed incessantly. In the lamp-light the blade of the Louisianian bickered like a flame. It played about the great form of the black lambently. It darted past him as a snake's tongue darts. It seemed to hiss in the heavy air. It flowed along him in lines of quivering radiance. Now and again it melted and streamed down his sides. Thrice it flickered within an inch of the throat. Mus-

sach was a fencer of talent; there could be no doubt of that — he was as yet alive.

The duel had lasted five minutes when there came to the American an added quickness of movement, an added intensity of purpose. Upon the black's forehead beads of sweat were hanging and he was panting slightly, though the surety of his defence was unmarred. Something like despair was creeping into his eyes, however, and each successive lunge of his, though as quick as the last, was more slowly recovered. His antagonist watched him with undimished closeness. Suddenly the Garza blade described two "double disengages," the movement called by Dumas "deceiving circle." There was a rapid "half-cut," bringing it in tierce, a single "disengage," of light-like speed and a straight lunge, the sword-hand held high almost as the eyes. The point struck the black fairly at the base of the throat, the rapier slipped through for half its length and was instantly withdrawn. Mussach fell as if smitten with an axe, his weapon clanging down.

Revel stirred the limp body with his foot.

"It is a good blow, though ornate," he said slowly. "He would have called to the guard in another second."

He seized the lamp and stepped fearlessly into the passage. He was gone some little time, but when he came back said: "The great door was closed after him. The men are on the farther side and could have heard nothing. Doubtless they are asleep. Let us go."

He replaced Mussach's sword in its scabbard, strapped the Gaikwar's treasure upon the Greek's cowering shoulders and motioned him to take hold of the feet. "There is little blood," he remarked, as they worked the body through the hole. He crouched in the tunnel long enough to replace carefully the stone, then extinguished the dark lantern. They came out into the water, the corpse lying half submerged between them. Revel took an oar, set it against the ribs and gave it a shove. Mussach surged into the current, floated face upward for a moment, then sank. They remained in shadow until clear of the town, then the slayer bent to his work. He did not speak until the stars were growing dim.

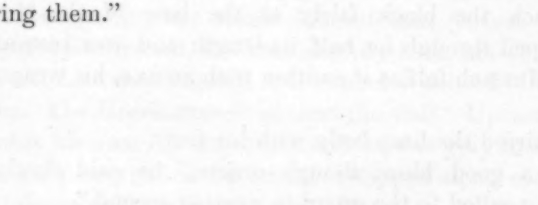
"It will be some hours before Mussach is missed, and some days before he is found, if the crocodiles spare him. We will strike the railroad to Bombay before noon. No one will be apt to mark the dried stain on the floor. The black dog bled inwardly. I would give something to see the Gaikwar's fat face when he finds that we have all disappeared. There is his sword in the chest, too. I wonder how long it will take him to discover his loss."

"He will not discover it," said the Greek, "until he takes the counterfeit to a jeweller. I know my work."

They caught an outgoing steamer next morning.

"Where do we disembark?" asked Revel, as they watched the land fading.

"At Port Said," Constantin answered. "I have some friends there who are experts in scattering jewels. It is almost as difficult as gathering them."



The Unmaking of Mr. Lynch.*

BY C. C. NEWKIRK.

THERE are men who cannot outlive their childish fears of darkness — men who cannot step into a black, deserted chamber, or mount a gloomy stairway to empty corridors, after nightfall, without a nameless, creepy terror in their hearts. Cyrus Holden, banker, was such a man.

In the prime of his bachelor life the coming of each night brought with it the foolish fears that rightly belonged to his childhood. His weakness was a secret which no living person shared. The banker entertained often and lavishly in his magnificent home where none lived save himself and his servants. On such occasions, when merriment ran high, the host's laughter was as loud and his wit as sharp as any there. After the guests had departed and the servants had stolen to bed — after the laughter of the half-spent night was hushed and the clinking of the wine-glasses had died away — Cyrus Holden would steal tremblingly to his sleeping-room to toss, sometimes, until the dawn, his eyes wide open, his hearing acute and every nerve tense, suffering the torments which his wild imagination conjured up.

If he slept it was to dream of a man, whose face was half masked in black, stealing toward him with a glittering blade held ready to strike. As the murderer drove the knife into his heart the banker would awake to hear the echo of his own agonizing shriek. His forehead would be beaded with moisture and his body quivering in fear. The nightmare was invariably the same — the panther-like man in the black mask — the gleaming knife.

Later, when Cyrus Holden closed his library and bedroom even to the eyes of his own servants, there were whispered speculations as to his sanity, in which the butler, the coachman and the maid offered their views. Outside the great house, no one knew or

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cared. From the time he had begun to double-lock and bolt these two rooms from all eyes save his own, there appeared to have been lifted from Cyrus Holden some great care. The lines which sleepless nights had etched upon his face disappeared and the flush of health and vigor came there instead. When he left the house for the day he saw to it that his sleeping-room and library were as safe from invasion as the vaults of his bank. As for the window, it was always barred and the blinds closely drawn.

Only two men living to-day know the mystery of the locked chambers. One is Mr. Cyrus Holden, banker; the other is Mr. Jim Lynch, professional burglar and cracksman.

Curiosity did not prompt Mr. Lynch to pry into the banker's secret. The housebreaker's motive was merely a business "proposition" on which he hoped to realize handsomely for his time, trouble and risk. If Cyrus Holden had known that the stranger who went through his house in the guise of an insurance inspector was a desperate criminal sought after by the police of a dozen cities, he might have experienced a return of the old fear. If the banker had known that, as he walked abroad, a genteel shadow stole behind, or when he sat at lunch two eyes studied him from behind a newspaper, the sleepless nights might have come back.

Mr. Lynch made his entrance, unannounced, through a rear window, shortly after midnight. The burglar stood for a time in the corridor to listen. His immovable figure was concordant with the silence and darkness that reigned throughout the great house. Suddenly a bright eye looked about with inquisitive activity. Behind it two human orbs burned through the holes in a black half-mask and a firm forefinger felt its way about a pistol trigger. Then the light stole noiselessly forward the length of the corridor and, as an aid in case of a hasty exit, Mr. Lynch unbolted the front door before he turned to creep up the broad stairway.

On the upper landing to the right was the banker's library and, opening from it to the rear, his bedroom. The burglar first examined the barred window and then bent to study the fastenings of the library door. To go through the window it would be necessary to saw the bars; if through the door, there would be two combination locks to "work," and perhaps a bolt or more on the inside. Mr. Lynch reflected a moment and then, moving to the

rear, began to pick the door-lock of the room beyond the banker's sleeping chamber. It offered slight resistance to a man who had burrowed his way through iron and steel.

As the cracksman pushed open the door and stepped over the threshold, the beam of the bull's-eye was playing on the interior of the room and the revolver was in shooting position. Mr. Lynch operated on the theory that every locked room he entered was occupied until he had proven the contrary. He had never met an emergency for which he was not prepared. The room, however, was untenanted, and to his satisfaction the burglar observed a door leading into the banker's sleeping apartment, which was not secured by double-locks and bolts, as he had found the library door.

Mr. Lynch placed his ear to the keyhole and listened for the breathing of the sleeper, but he heard nothing. Then he began with the utmost caution on the lock. He made less noise than the gnawing of a rat. The faint clink of the skeleton keys could scarcely have been heard beyond three feet — they would not have awakened the most restless sleeper.

When the door was ready to be opened the burglar closed the slide of his lantern and was swallowed up in the blackness about him. Noiselessly he turned the knob and gently pushed open the door of the secret chamber. The banker's bedroom was dark. Over the transom from the library came enough light to give the interior a weird, phosphorescent glow, but not sufficient to annoy a sleeper or reveal the bed. Very slowly the intruder allowed a tiny ray from his lantern to travel across the floor till it found it, and then steal quietly up from the foot of the massive bedstead till it fell the briefest moment upon a pallid face, and was then withdrawn before the lightest sleeper could awake. He knew Cyrus Holden perfectly well by sight. The motionless figure lay in apparent deep and quiet sleep, one arm thrown above the head and the other extended on the coverlet. But Mr. Lynch had known men, under similar circumstances, to feign sleep, and as he advanced toward the bed with the velvet tread of a cat, both revolver and lantern were in readiness. As he bent downward to study the banker's face, the burglar suddenly stood erect and shrank back, crouching.

The open eyes were fixed in a glassy stare upon the ceiling!

During that moment of awful suspense the ray of light was again allowed for an instant to rest on the face. A pennyweight's more pressure on the trigger would have sent a bullet into the body on the bed. For the first time in his professional career Mr. Lynch felt his nerve oozing away. The uncanny stare of the open eyes unbalanced him. Was it the frozen stare of fear, or of sleep, or of death? If death, so much the better — but it was Mr. Lynch's principle to take nothing for granted until proven.

Placing his revolver on the carpet, he drew a gleaming knife and again crept toward the bed. The motionless face did not quiver an eyelash, only lay looking upward with that haunting, damnable stare. When the light had moved within a foot of the face, a strong arm swung from the inky background and drove the knife hilt-deep into the spot which to the robber's trained eye covered the sleeper's heart. As he pulled upward, his fingers slipped over the handle and the knife was left firmly fixed. The violence of the thrust turned the body on its side with the face away. A tremor ran through it, and then the figure lay motionless.

Mr. Lynch reeled as he stooped to pick up the revolver. Cold beads of sweat stood out on his forehead, and his legs quivered under him. Turning his back upon the bed, he worked with feverish haste to finish and get away. From cabinet to dresser he hurried, leaving the drawers open and their contents strewn about the floor, but he found nothing of value. The library — then he would be through! The door was closed, but not latched. Noiselessly but hastily pushing it open, he stepped from the haunting chamber into the flood of light.

"Good God!"

There before him, with a revolver levelled full at him, stood the perfect image of Cyrus Holden! Mr. Lynch's nerve stretched and snapped! He was standing on the edge of eternity! He only knew one thing to do — shoot before the other fellow! Like a lightning flash he swung his own weapon into position and pulled the trigger — once! — twice!! — thrice!!! — all in a second's time! Through the smoke he saw the figure yet standing in the same threatening posture — piercing him with that stony stare from behind the levelled revolver. It did not shoot — *it did not move!* Was it man or devil?

The next instant the weapon dropped from the burglar's hand, and turning he ran screaming and cursing through the dark chamber, where the body lay with the knife driven into it — through the next room into the corridor — headlong down the steps and out into the streets from the awful place — unmanned and a temporary maniac.

The banker awoke at the three shots to hear the unearthly shrieks and hurried flight of some one through his secret chambers. A moment afterward, a concealed panel door opened from a wall of the bed-chamber where the body lay, and Cyrus Holden timidly emerged from his unknown sleeping closet, bearing a light. He advanced to the bed and rolled the wax counterfeit of himself on its back. A knife was sticking in the cardiac region of the dummy double. Then the banker crossed into the library. The wax statue of himself which stood there, holding the leveled revolver, presented a most grotesque appearance. A portion of its lower jaw was shot away, and there were two other bullet holes in the body, either of which would have proved fatal — if the dummy had been a man.

At his feet Mr. Holden found Mr. Lynch's lighted bull's-eye and revolver. This suggested to him the probability that the burglar would not tell the secret of the locked chambers, and he hastily refastened the doors as he heard the butler coming up. As the banker again passed through the panel door into his secret sleeping closet, there was a look of pleased triumph on his face. The disfigurement of the wax dummies did not seem to annoy him. They had proven valuable substitutes, and he could order two more from Paris.

The cool night air and the peaceful suburban street brought Mr. Lynch to himself with a jerk. He realized that his conduct was unprofessional in the extreme, and pulling off the black half-mask, he slunk into the darkness of a convenient alley. An hour later he was speeding from the city aboard the first outbound train. That was his last night's work in the "crooked" line.

The Quarantined Bridegroom.*

BY EDNA KENTON.

HE Monday night rehearsal went off without a hitch and there was where the ensuing trouble lay. If all the girls had not been bridesmaids far beyond the fatal third time, or if the men had not ushered at twenty-five or so weddings before the Doctor and Lilian chose them for theirs, we should have had another rehearsal Tuesday night, and thereby the Doctor would have been spared much sorrow. But we didn't have that rehearsal. Instead, in response to a message from some old college men, we went into Chicago for a farewell spread, with our minds about made up to stay all night and come out to Riverside the next morning in time for the noon wedding.

We found a reception committee awaiting us at the Union Station, all the men of the bridal party, the two old fraternity men, and a small following carefully selected. Most of them knew Lil, and between you and me there were two of them there who would have given the sized fortunes they want to own to have been in the Doctor's tans right then. Lilian told me all about them when she was trying to get something out of me about the Doctor.

After the fun was over, some time early that morning, we went around to the Hotel Continent and prepared for the five or six hours' sleep we could count on. I think I had quite dropped off when I was roused by a sleepy mumble from the Doctor:

"What's that?"

We both listened intently. A sound of muffled crying fell on our ears, and hurrying footsteps, and twice, sounds as if some heavy body were being borne past our door.

"What is it?" I demanded in my turn, almost wide awake.

"Sounds as if some one had died and was being carried off," he

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* The writer of this story received a cash prize of $150 in THE BLACK CAT story contest ending March 31, 1900.

returned, with a sleepy heartlessness characteristic of doctors.

Very soon the momentary confusion had died away, and as we were too sleepy to speculate further, the conversation dropped.

The next thing I knew was a vicious punch which brought me up standing — literally. The Doctor, wild-eyed and half-dressed, was towering above me.

"Will you never wake up!" he cried. "That confounded darkey didn't call us, and it's a quarter to ten. Get up!"

It was his wedding day, and on that ground his lack of refinement of manner toward a sleepy man may possibly be excused. At all events, I began dressing with all possible speed, and with commendable self-control refrained from expressing my mind when the Doctor attempted to hurry me up between times.

In my struggle with my cuffs I did not notice his temporary absence until the door flew open with a kick, and I turned to see him standing in the doorway. I whistled as I saw his face.

"What's up?" I ejaculated.

"Do you know what those sounds meant last night?"

"No, do you?"

"Where's my hat? I'm going to try for it, anyway."

I continued to stare in completest amazement as the Doctor proceeded to raid the room.

"Ross! Are you crazy? Is anything up, and if so, what? What were those sounds and what did they mean?"

"Small-pox patients is what they meant then, and now it means that we're caught in a pest house!"

I stood in stupid wonder, hardly comprehending. He repeated:

"A pest house, I tell you! Two men sick with the small-pox were carried past us last night up to the top story, and this place is quarantined! Do you know what that means?"

"Well, let's move on!" I seized my coat, with no very definite idea of action.

"Yes, let's! With double locked doors, and a cordon of policemen all about the building! Even the fire-escapes!"

"Did you try to crawl out?"

"No, but I threw up a window to see if I could."

"Can we?"

"Can we! A burly devil in brass waved a club from the bal-

cony. 'None o' that, me foine young dhrummer, we're onto yure thricks. Siven av yez it is 'es thried it before an' yure the eighth! Git ba-ack!"

"How much has it spread?"

"Two genuines and six suspects — and everybody held here by the Board of Health!"

Then I roared. "And you to be married at twelve to-day and caught like a rat!"

"Don't be a fool, Carl. Think of your sister, if the joke's so heavy on me."

I sobered up at that. Poor little Lil!

"We can telephone," I ventured feebly.

"Yes, or telegraph, and while we're doing it, read the papers and have a nice, quiet day. Hang it! I've got to get out of here, do you understand? Got to get out, if I jump for it. Where's your nerve to sit down and telephone?"

His sarcasm touched me. I pulled out my watch.

"It's three minutes of ten," I said. "There's a train at eleven; the only one to get you there on time."

"And some swift work has to be done in sixty-three minutes, for that train has to be made."

"Sure," I said, and began to think. Ross broke the silence.

"You've been on a newspaper long enough to know how to 'cover' a thing that has to be found out. Suppose you go down to that clerk and tell him by all that's good and holy, you have to make Riverside by noon; a wedding; that you and your friend are important, best men or something. For heaven's sake don't say I'm the groom! The place is alive with crazy drummers, and there's too many of them to make it pleasant for a poor devil in my fix. Tell him anything, only go!"

"Shall I telephone out home?"

"Not until — but we *can't miss* that train. Wait till after eleven, anyway."

I left him and walked down the hall, fervently regretting that my education had included no course in Talleyrand tactics. Still, with the story I had, I could almost stand pat. In the elevator I met several fellow-prisoners and one of them asked:

"Are you a Chicago man?"

"Once. New Yorker now."

"Well, sir, this is a devil of a mess for me. I'm travelling for Hoyt & Hoyt, New York, and if I don't get a noon train I lose them a cool ten thousand. Are you in a hurry to get out?"

"Rather!"

"Well, my friend! I'll do almost anything for you if you'll fix up a good lie that will put us both in the streets. I'm worn to the bone with trying, and the condemned management is down on me anyway, because I tried to crawl down a water-spout at seven this morning and got yanked into the first window I struck. Since then nothing I say goes. What's your fix?"

"A wedding."

"Ah, pardon me, yours?"

"My sister's. Best man, you know."

"By George! You're bridegroom and I'm best man. See!"

"It's a bright idea," I replied, "but unfortunately it's already here. Bridegroom's caught with me."

"My luck! When is it to be?"

"To-day, noon."

My new acquaintance whistled. "Two hours! My position to your chances."

We were walking across the office now. "How did those two sick men get in here?" I asked.

"From the East; got ill about seven last night, and the doctors found well developed cases. Too many chances had been given for infection, and this morning the Health Board shut everybody up like cattle. I get just one comfort out of it and that is that the management is madder than we are."

"Well," I said, "here's my man."

"I'm sorry for you," my companion said. "Try your story, but I warn you in advance that that clerk's ribs are refrigerated and his heart registers one hundred and twenty degrees below."

I walked up to the clerk. There was nothing striking about him except the tired look in his eyes.

"I want to state a case," I began diplomatically, as I handed him my card.

"Yes, sir, what's *your* story?" There was an unpleasant emphasis about the rejoinder that grated on me.

"Well, it's one that hasn't been beat," I retorted. "We're due as best man and usher at a noon wedding to-day — "

"My dear sir," the clerk leaned impressively forward, "since seven A. M. I have kept careful count and you are the thirteenth best man in this hotel. Your friend makes the fourteenth. There are also up to date seven bridegrooms, nine men who were to officiate as pall bearers this afternoon, seventeen who are due at the funerals of near relatives, in fact — Oh, don't misunderstand me! I don't doubt your story of course, only you can't get out." His teeth snapped like a steel trap.

"But — "

"Now keep cool, sir. Any message you may wish to send to the bride," he smiled, "will be telephoned or telegraphed. But this house is quarantined."

"What about his heart?" asked my chance acquaintance, as I rejoined him.

"Every good lie has been told," I answered, moodily.

He chuckled. "I could have told you that. You see twenty-four of my clan registered here last night."

We walked past the telephone room, where a crowd of angry, excited men waited their turns to communicate with their firms. My companion nodded to several of them as we passed.

"Will that deal come off without you?" one asked him.

"Unless they stop it at New York. I've done all I can do."

I opened our door with the sense of my unfulfilled mission lying heavy upon me. "It's no go," I said, sadly.

"Then I'll go down myself."

"But it's an old story, Ross."

"I'll make it a new one."

And I think he succeeded in impressing the clerk, though that gentleman's velvet glove still failed to cover a hand of flesh.

"Yes, sir," came his answer, "I sympathize with the young lady, but since the time your friend here informed me you were to be groomsman — "

"He's shy," I interpolated easily, despite the detected lie.

"—— I've listened to three other bridegrooms. Your trouble appears to be genuine and if you want to send any message —." He smiled wearily as the Doctor flung himself away.

Back again in that cell we had to call home for how long, and 10.14!

"We haven't gone at this thing in the right way," I began.

"No?" the Doctor muttered in extreme surprise.

"No, we didn't take time to think it over in all its bearings."

"We're liable to have plenty of time on our hands to do all the thinking we're capable of. That poor girl! How long since you were vaccinated, Carl?"

"During the big scare, several months ago."

"Did it take?"

"Did it!" I whistled as I thought of that arm of mine.

"Well, then, neither of us is in any danger, even if we'd been exposed, which we haven't. We weren't in the dining room where those confounded hospital recruits were. I'm a doctor, and — "

"You're a doctor," I burst out joyfully. The significance of the fact had quite escaped me. "Don't you see," I went on, "you can demand the recognition your profession entitles you to. Go down to that clerk and tell him — "

"Why in thunder didn't you think of this in the first place!" His tones were full of a furious reproach. I forgave him, for he had just pulled out his watch. But to blame me, as if one fellow was supposed to remember another fellow's diploma for him! The next thing I heard from him was in the office.

"But I tell you — " he was saying excitedly.

"How many things are you? Best man, bridegroom, doc — "

"But I've got to get out of here!" he almost yelled.

"Now, look here, sir — " the clerk motioned to a mulatto porter who had evidently just come in from somewhere, for he stood cap in hand near the railing. "We are too busy to be trifled with. You can't get out on any move you make till the Board lifts the quarantine. Why, man, there are just three people who can pass that door, this porter, the President of the Health Board, and Dr. Jennings, the physician in charge. Now I'm going to request that you let this porter see you to your rooms. If you don't go quietly and stay quietly a policeman from outside can be detailed to attend you. I sincerely hope that won't be necessary. Before you go do you want to send a message to that girl?"

"No!" the Doctor roared.

"Go up with your friend." The clerk's tone to me was crisp to frostiness. "The annoyance of repeated endeavors to get out has become so great that we intend to clear the office. You can ring for anything you wish. The attendance will be prompt."

"Then there's no lie that will pass us?" I queried.

"You ought to know," he retorted.

Wrapt in a powerless calm I turned to follow Ross and his guard. As I walked across the floor behind them it even then occurred to me in a vague, indefinite sort of way that never does man originate anything within himself, but that upon the most insignificant chances, oftentimes, do those things the world calls original thoughts turn. For instance, if my friend had not started ahead of me, if the porter had not followed him closely, and if I had not meekly brought up the rear, I should never, in all probability, have had suggested to me the train of thought that, followed out to its logical conclusion, brought about the ultimate confusion of that czar of the hotel, our friend the clerk. I thought of many things, but by the time we reached our room my thoughts had crystallized into one, and following it out I motioned the boy in. Once in I locked the door. He looked rather scared.

"Do you like money?" I took out a roll of bills, but his eyes did not light up. I went on impressively. "You can earn this," I flashed a ten-dollar bill before his eyes, "and this," I waved another, "and this, by consenting to stand tied up to the bed-post for an hour, while this gentleman does you the honor of wearing your clothes. It's no use for you to kick. We can tackle you, and we can gag you, and we've got stuff to chloroform you if we can't manage you any other way, but strip you must, and it's a dear job for you, Doc, in more ways than one."

He had already caught the idea and was standing before the mirror in his shirtsleeves.

"It's no go," he said, despairingly. "I'm as black as that fellow to be sure, but look at this moustache, and no way to get it off."

"It's the first villain's entrance we've had, just in time," I said, as I flung him my pocket razor.

"What will Lilian say!" he muttered a few moments later, as he surveyed himself clean shaven for the first time in years.

"It's still luck if she has a chance to say anything."

"What time is it?"

"10.24. It will be close time at best, but if you get outside you can surely make it. Telephone Lil and tell her how sorry I am to smash the procession business to pieces." Then I turned my attention to the boy whom I had been busy tying to the bed with strips of sheeting. As a result of the severe examination I conducted during the next few moments, I found that the Doctor might be able to make his escape through the front entrance, if he couldn't find a rear one; that sometimes the boy had to show a pass card and sometimes not; that he had had such a card last time but had lost it; that the gentleman was to say that Dr. Jennings had sent him, and, to quote the negro, he (the Doctor) was a-rarin' and a-snortin', he's so hurrified! The outlook for the Doctor was gloomy indeed if the negro were so well known as to need no pass card, but the attempt must be made.

By this time Ross was giving the finishing touches to his toilet and time was flying with an hitherto unequalled rapidity. We shut the door on the negro and walked down the hall together. As we waited for the elevator, a man passed us and glanced at us piercingly. Ross shrank into the shadow.

"All guests to their rooms." Our ill-met friend had that familiar decisiveness about his tone which seemed a requisite in this hotel's employés.

"Are you authorized to turn this hotel into an establishment run under Joliet rules?" I asked.

"We are authorized to keep irresponsible persons from getting the small-pox," he returned. "You must go back to your room, sir."

"It seems to me," I said as I heard the welcome rattle of the elevator, and saw the Doctor's fingers — how confoundedly white they were — tighten about his cap, "that the employés of this hotel are exemplifying a principle of government that few nations have shown so clearly — oh, don't hurry me, my friend. You all seem carried away with the drunkenness of rule. Absolute monarchies," down came the iron cage and stopped. "Absolute monarchies," down it had started with Ross inside. I laughed. "Absolute monarchies, my dear sir, are hotbeds for treason, strate-

gems and spoils. You are sure I can't get out to-day? Yes? Then I'll go back to my room."

I walked down the hall, thinking of Lilian. If I could but make sure that he was at that moment well started on his way to her. He could not possibly reach the house before a quarter to twelve, but even that would make an approximate noon wedding. Why hadn't we gone home with one of the fellows for the night. Or why hadn't we prolonged the jollification and taken the earliest morning train out to Riverside. Why hadn't we —

I remember that I stared vacantly for some seconds at a card lying on the red carpet at my door before I picked it up. I read it over twice. "Let bearer pass, special." Then I turned it over. "Dr. Arthur Lyons Jennings!"

I kicked open my door and plunged into the room. "Is this the card you lost?" I asked of my captive. He nodded, speechless. With no more thought of him I dragged on my light overcoat, thankful for the chilly lake breeze that would permit my overcoat collar to be drawn up about my face. I laughed at the insistent irony of the Doctor's freakish fate. He, the Doctor, had to attempt his escape in the thin disguise of a negro porter. I, who did not know certainly the difference between the æsophagus and larynx, would in a few moments pose as Dr. Jennings's most trusted assistant. My sheet-tied prisoner found his tongue just as I dragged open the door, but what he said fell on the unfeeling atmosphere. I wanted to catch the 11.00 suburban.

The elevator boy, though young, was already unpleasantly permeated by the pernicious atmosphere of suspicion that infected the whole hotel force with a greater vigor than the small-pox germs. He was evidently under orders, for he was unpleasantly curious about my personality, and my telling him I had just come from visiting another suspect didn't help matters much.

"Look here," I said as we neared the lower floor, "I'm in a hurry and can't be trifled with. This small-pox is spreading and your position as elevator boy running up almost to the pest floor is a dangerous one. You don't want to stop a man who's trying to save your life just because you can't keep his face in your mind. Boy, you've got the pustules now —" He had pushed me out with a muttered groan and the cage was flying upwards.

The crisis had come. With my hat drawn low and my collar pulled high, I approached the side entrance.

"I beg your pardon." The hotel attendant once more, with his politeness and his ubiquity. I handed him my card and spoke through my collar in a confidential tone.

"The plague is spreading. Six new cases. We need help."

"Impossible!" he said in a shocked tone. He unlocked the door. At the signal the four policemen outside fell back. My heart gave a great bound. That freedom had come so naturally I could not believe. As the lock clicked behind me I checked a mad impulse to run, and turned to one of the policemen.

"Has a messenger passed out recently?" I asked.

"Yes. About five minutes ago, wasn't it, Mick?"

"The scaredest nigger I ever see. Small-pox or yellow jack kills them black people by scaring them to death."

"The regular messenger?" I inquired.

"I reckon, sir. He's the only one they've let out this morning."

"No, it wasn't him," interposed another six feet two of brass buttons and blue cloth. "I —"

But I was gone. So Ross had in some mysterious way escaped. Now for that train! Down to and around the first corner. A glance at my watch. By cable to Adams — a Union car just missed, no time to wait for the next one. Up Adams on a run with the streets full as they are near noon. Heavens! a steamer whistle — and the bridge! A policeman picked me up with a curse as I landed on the other side on all fours from a flying leap across five feet of the Chicago river. One second more and I should have had to wait for the passage of two lumber boats. I thrust him aside and ran on. My legs were going automatically. My head was full to bursting. But I made it! Just as the station clock pointed to eleven I dashed down the steps, through the gates, and swung up on the rear platform of the trembling train. All left now was to get my wind, a serious matter, and then go through the train and find the Doctor. I laughed hysterically, as the train moved out, and I thought of what his surprise would be to find me standing before him. I mopped my face and drew my first long breath, which I caught half way with a start that nearly put my heart out of place. There, coming at a desperate pace

down the track, so desperate a run as to be gaining on the train's increasing speed, was a figure that I knew, uniformed, capless!

My first mad impulse was to help.

"Ross," I roared, "hurry up!"

He was too busy to hear the insult, but he recognized me, for he waved. I turned to ring the engineer's bell. Fate of fates, the door was locked!

"Hurry up," I yelled again, and reached out a hand across the five feet of space that yawned between us. That helping hand did the work! He leaned forward to grasp it, lost his balance, tripped, and fell face down. Just then the engine put on good steam, and with a triumphant shriek swept away. I was still leaning far over the brakes when he rose slowly to his feet. For a second he stood motionless, his lips moving convulsively. Then he raised his arm, and even at that distance I shrank from the venom of his fist as he shook it after me.

I had plenty of time before the conductor opened the door to muse again on the Doctor's freakish fate. What had detained him, with his five or six minutes' start? It would not be my fault if the "procession business" were smashed to pieces.

Lilian, poor girl! When I reached home I found her in white satin and on the verge of hysterics. All the mourning relatives got together in her room, and while I had my things laid out I told our story.

Lilian is a heroine! She never flinched when I said small-pox, though three of the aunts swerved off and took out their salts. I had no need to assure her of the truth of the Doctor's message that there was no more danger for her than in any walk along State Street, though such assurances a thousand times repeated would have failed to eliminate the smelling-bottles. Fully aware of this slight failing in my aunts, I did not exhaust myself in making the statement more than once, but occupied myself in dressing.

Twelve o'clock and no bridegroom! At all events he was starting from the city on the noon train. That would bring him here in time for a one o'clock wedding. Meantime two blocks away yawned the church with its waiting people.

We sent word to the organist to keep on playing. If the Doctor didn't come in an hour — but he would. And he did. Fif-

teen minutes later, as I stood on the veranda with two of the men we had dined with the night before, I saw far down the road a revolving cloud of dust, which seemed to hold a scorcher in its midst. A thrill of expectancy shot through me which became a mad joy as the dusty figure resolved itself into the blue-garbed one I had seen an hour and a quarter before standing in the middle of the Burlington track. I went into the hall and whistled shrilly. Lilian flew to the head of the stairs with a rustle of satin and lace.

"Is it Ross, Carl?"

"Yes, the fool, on a wheel!"

Just then the fellows outside set up such a roar that I had to go out to them. Ross was just dismounting from a rocky wheel, the toughest looking bridegroom I've ever seen since my first year at reporting, when I wrote up a newsboy's wedding in the Tenderloin.

"Where are my things?" he asked, between his short breathings.

"Upstairs. Shut up, you idiots," to the jollying men. "Doc, why in thunder didn't you wait for the noon train instead of trying to kill time in this deadly way?"

"That's right! pitch in! Because I'd have died, if you want to know, doing nothing for an hour. This wheel? Paid twenty dollars for it. The dealer wouldn't rent a new one to the looking object I am. It's a '91 model, I think."

"What kept you? You got out before I did."

"Stopped to telephone."

"They didn't hear — "

"No, I couldn't get connection, but I wasted good time trying. O Lilian, heavens!"

But Lilian was in his arms. For once in our lives we saw a woman unmindful of her clothes, and on most of us the sight had a lasting effect. It was Ross who did all the thinking.

"My dearest, all this finery, and I with these things on! Don't! I had to," as Lilian raised her head and started back with a faint scream. "That darkey didn't have one, and I had to shave. Yes, dear, get away, you will ruin your gown."

It wasn't a twelve o'clock wedding, and it was a curious gathering in consequence that we had to face, but at twenty minutes to one the vestry door opened and Dr. Ross Bertrand and his best

man, Mr. Carl Clay, brother of the bride, took their places inside the chancel rail, with the choir boys sweeping in behind. Then with a fresh burst of music, through the great entrance Lilian and her maids floated in, and in another ten minutes what the Doctor had waded through troubled seas to accomplish was done. Of its terrors no visible reminder lingered, but from the front pew, wafted high above the odors of lilies and roses, came to us the pungent scent of Aunt Gertrude's lavender salts. Not for another month will she believe Lilian safe from the dread disease.

The Doctor and Lilian are out at the Yellowstone now. I have just written them the sequel of our month-old adventure. Two nights ago I met that hotel clerk in a café. He stared at me curiously, and in a few moments rose and came over to me.

"If I am not mistaken — " he began.

"You aren't," I said.

He smiled. "Then would you mind — "

"Not at all," I answered, "on one condition."

"You can make it anything."

"That you don't lose the boy his job."

He looked puzzled. "You mean — "

"The porter."

"But we found him helpless, tied and all but gagged."

"That is part of the joke," I said, cordially.

"Of course we imagined that one of you walked off in his clothes."

"That was the Doctor as a porter."

"But how the other got out — "

"That was the best man as a doctor."

Then I told him the story.

When the Cuckoo Called.*

BY H. D. UMBSTÆTTER.

THE announcement that London music hall audiences are losing their heads and hearts over "The Girl with the Guitar" causes Mr. Seymour Gaston to smile as he looks down upon the world from his offices on the nineteenth floor of a New York sky-scraper. Mr. Gaston is an ingenious, much travelled young bachelor with a history and a fortune. He recently invented a folding fire-escape, which also has a history and in which another fortune is said to await him. And "The Girl with the Guitar" is one of the two Zillerthaler sisters, whose permanent address is unknown and who receive two hundred guineas a night for presenting their Tyrolean second-sight séance. To such an extent do these mysterious maidens from the mountains hypnotize the public that they appear nightly at four different music halls. At the Alhambra they open the performance at eight o'clock, after which they are rushed by their manager in an automobile to the stage door of the second music hall, where they appear at eight forty-five, and so on, winding up at the Aquarium at a few minutes before ten with a thousand dollars in their pockets for the evening's work.

When the curtain rises upon their ten-minute act it discloses a typical Tyrolean scene — dim mountains in the background, a sombre pine forest, a toylike, gabled cottage in the distance. The lights are low and the stage is empty. The orchestra begins almost inaudibly a simple melody in the minor key. Presently a rich voice, that raises doubt in the mind of the listener as to whether it is male or female, joins in. It is a song of love, a serenade. The lights grow dimmer. A new sound steals into the concerted music of voice and instruments; there are strange, bizarre chords and rippling arpeggios, and then the music is drowned in the burst of wild applause that greets the appearance

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of "The Girl with the Guitar." She bows modestly, the lights go up, the rich voice is heard again in a joyous yodel, and the sister, too, appears, dressed in the picturesque attire of an Alpine hunter. This artistically conceived prologue brings the audience into closer sympathy with what follows. "The Girl with the Guitar," unheeding the applause and the demonstrations of the male portion of the audience, seats herself at the extreme right of the stage near the footlights. The sister is led by the manager along a narrow platform projecting into the centre of the hall, where, after being blindfolded, she seats herself with her back to the stage, and the real performance begins, to the muted music of the orchestra and the sad, fantastic chords of the guitar. The second-sight séance progresses in the time-honored way, except that no word is spoken save by the blindfolded sister, who accurately names and describes, in a clear, musical voice, each article as it is borrowed from the audience and held up in silence before the footlights by the manager, some thirty feet behind her back. "A gold watch with a picture of a lady on its face"; "a pair of pearl opera glasses"; "a half-crown piece with a hole in it"; and so on, the blindfolded girl describes the exhibits as though they were held out before her naked eyes. She never falters, never misses, and the puzzled look that comes to every face shows how completely she has mastered her art. But it is the strange, brilliant beauty and the fantastic music of "The Girl with the Guitar," who, seemingly unconscious of her surroundings, gazes idly across the stage, that hold the breathless attention of the audience. Music like hers has never before been heard from any instrument. It is absolutely unique; a new scale and new system of harmonics seem to have been discovered by this sombre-eyed girl. It is her weird, haunting melodies that trouble the mind with strange thoughts, and the impression of mystical, occult powers at work, produced by the performance, is really traceable to this music and the mysterious personality of the girl which pervades and dominates it all.

All this vividly recalls to Mr. Gaston a ten-minute drama of life in which he once played a part and which illustrates how a man can regain his lost peace of mind by being suddenly brought to the brink of eternity.

Four years ago, while he was managing the affairs of a large American enterprise in London, a cablegram announced to him one day that his business partner in the United States had robbed him of all he possessed. Brooding over his ruined business, to which he had given ten years of his life and sacrificed his health, his peace of mind fled and he travelled aimlessly over the Continent in search of anything that might bring him sleep and help him to bury the past. The doctors sent him to Baden-Baden, but he soon found that the conventional watering-place, where one reads suffering in almost every face, proved an irritant to his insomnia. The more he came in contact with humanity the more he felt drawn toward Nature. So he started on a tour of the Black Forest. At Trieberg, the picturesque little village which stands on the edge of a great waterfall high up in the dark, pine-clothed mountains, he found pleasure for a few days in visiting the quaint cottages scattered through the surrounding wilderness where the cuckoo clocks, music-boxes and wood carvings are made that always attract foreigners. The mountaineers carry these clocks and carvings on the back for miles down the winding, perilous pathways to a public exhibition hall at Trieberg in which is kept a full line of samples for the convenience of purchasers.

But the novelty of these scenes soon wore off, and on the third day after his arrival Gaston, craving excitement, bribed the custodian of this exhibition hall to set off all the clocks and instruments at intervals of one second. The chorus of a thousand cuckoos, reinforced by the patriotic rendering of "Die Wacht am Rhein," the William Tell Overture and "Die Lorelei" by scores of orchestrions and music-boxes, delighted him, but proved demoralizing to a party of American tourists bent on doing Europe in ten days. Mistaking their excited brandishing of alpenstocks, umbrellas and Baedeckers for demonstrations of approval, the keeper kept up the performance until the inexorable schedule dragged the prospective purchasers away. They had spent the ten minutes allotted to the Black Forest.

In his wanderings and search for adventure, Gaston came one day upon what seemed like an unused trail that led higher up the mountain from an almost impenetrable jumble of rocks and pines near the waterfall.

"The Witches' Path," exclaimed his landlord, when questioned, "and whoever follows it never returns." It might have an outlet in another valley beyond, he added, but, shaking his head, there were strange stories about the Witches' Path, and while he could not verify them he knew that no one of his guests who had essayed to explore it had ever come back.

Sick of chattering men and women, harrowed day and night by his troubles, Gaston rejoiced in the prospect of an adventure of any kind, and while he smiled at the suggestion of danger lurking in the recesses of the Witches' Path, he secretly hoped there might be. Life was not a joyful possession to Seymour Gaston in those days, and he cared little whether he lived or died. So, early the following morning, with a well-provisioned knapsack on his back and an alpenstock in his hand he set out upon the Witches' Path. After ten hours of climbing, crawling, sliding and slipping over almost impassable rocks and through impossible thickets, the trail led into a stretch of forest so dense as to completely shut out the fading daylight, and the wanderer was glad to accept as a bed the thick, endless carpet of pine needles that lay stretched out before him. The following morning he resumed his journey and at noon discovered, high on the mountain side, what appeared like a gray toy-house hidden among the rocks and pines. After another hour of tiresome climbing he stood before a cottage built upon the very edge of an immense cleft. From far below echoed the hoarse booming of a mountain stream. His knock was answered by a short, white-bearded mountaineer with piercing gray eyes, who, upon learning that his visitor spoke German, received him hospitably with the remark that it was seldom indeed that visitors came his way to brighten the lonely lives of himself and niece, who, he added, lived by making cuckoo clocks. It required no urging on the part of Caspar Kollner, the cottager, to induce his guest to defer his return until the following day, and after supper, served by the mountaineer's attractive young niece, the tourist was equally willing to join his host in a pipe and game of écarté, while the young lady looked on and played weird airs upon her guitar. Whether it was the strange quality of her undeniable beauty and the sombre mystery of her eyes, or her music, Gaston soon lost interest in the game. Although there seemed

little purpose or training in her half listless playing, the sounds seemed to hint at unfathomable things, at fancies such as Gaston supposed might visit the soul of one who had strayed from the paths of his fellow-men into an exotic, unhealthy world of his own, where strange birds sang in a dusky, scented twilight. He played recklessly, lost steadily, and was repeatedly compelled to resort to the Bank of England notes in his wallet.

"You are in bad luck to-night. Shall we stop? You must be tired after your long tramp," at last suggested the host. Then, counting the money slowly and with evident pleasure, he handed to Gaston all the latter had lost. It was promptly pushed back protestingly, whereupon Kollner exclaimed, "Never! The pleasure is mine; the money is yours. It is my custom to play for stakes to lend interest to the game, but the law of hospitality forbids my keeping what I win." So Gaston returned the money to his wallet and bade his generous host and hostess good-night. Kollner led him to a large, low-studded room on the upper floor in which every article of furniture was elaborately hand-carved.

"The masterpiece of my craft," exclaimed Kollner, as he pointed with pride to a mammoth cuckoo clock, fully four feet wide and reaching nearly to the ceiling. "But our proudest possession," he continued, as he led his guest through a tall French window upon a small veranda, "is this," pointing to a view that caused Gaston to gasp for breath. The balcony directly overhung the mighty gorge, and from the gulf of blackness far below rose the sound of the tumultuous stream, while an uncertain moon threw fantastic shadows over the towering peaks above. "Most wonderful of all," continued Kollner, "is the echo, 'The Ghost of the Gorge' as it is called. You shall hear it at dawn." With that he wound up and set the big clock, adding, "When the cuckoo calls, rise and come to this balcony. My niece shall play from the rocks below and you will hear the spirit answer. Good-night!"

As on many other weary nights, sleep refused to come to Gaston. He lay for hours listening to the gurgle of the water and hearing in it echoes of the wild music of the guitar. Towards morning a feverish slumber came, from which he was aroused by the shrill "Cuckoo! Cuckoo!" of the mechanical bird.

Clad in his pajamas he drowsily groped his way in the dusk towards the balcony. He had almost reached it when he overturned the chair which had served to keep the window half open during the night. In its outward fall it carried down the balcony with a crash and Gaston, horror-stricken, barely kept his balance by grasping the window casing. From the dark chasm rose the weird strains of the guitar, echoing through the gorge. The Lorelei was calling! But her notes were drowned by the shrill creaking of the iron hinges upon which the balcony now swung to and fro below Gaston, and which, like a flash, told him he had been led to a man-trap of hellish ingenuity. Instantly horror gave way to anger and the instinct of self-defence roused him to action. For months he had been reckless of danger, almost courted death. Now he was seized with an overpowering desire to live. He turned from the window and began to dress hurriedly when a noise attracted his attention to the cuckoo clock. Was it a hideous delusion? No! The thing was actually moving towards the centre of the room! In another instant Kollner appeared from an adjoining room through a door which the clock had concealed, his eyes glaring fiendishly as they rested upon the empty bed. Then, as he turned and saw Gaston, his face became a mask of absolute fright and bewilderment. For a moment only he recoiled, then flung himself upon his guest with the fury of a beast. Each instantly realized that the struggle would be to the death. Frenzied by the miscarrying of his diabolical plot, the mountaineer struggled madly, blindly, for a grip that should enable him to hurl his adversary over the mighty precipice. Foiled again and again by the agility of Gaston and forced to the defensive, he turned towards the open door to escape. As he did so Gaston rushed upon him, pinned his arms to his sides, and pushed him inch by inch to the open window, and — Caspar Kollner reached the end of the Witches' Path! Ten minutes later Gaston found the niece quietly preparing breakfast. She looked surprised, but when he told her that her uncle and not he had answered the Lorelei's call, she asked, with naïve innocence, what he meant. It was only after he had threatened to hand her over to the police at Trieberg that she made this confession: —

She had been brought up by her uncle, who had invented the

folding balcony, and who always engaged his guests in a game of cards. He invariably won because he had taught her as a child to signal, by means of notes and chords on the guitar, the cards held by his opponent. He thus learned if his guests were supplied with money, and to gain their full confidence returned all they had lost. He was enabled to set the man-trap from his room below. Although the gorge held the remains of thirty victims, it was his boast that he had never killed a man, that each had of his own free will walked into eternity.

Gaston had heard enough. He did not stop for breakfast. He left Trieberg the following evening and thoughts of his business troubles no longer occupied his mind. When he returned to America he set to work to retrieve his lost fortune, and the folding fire-escape, he tells his friends, was suggested by something he saw abroad.

Gaston does not claim the gift of second sight, but he knows, he says, that in the performance of the Zillerthalers, the weird strains produced by "The Girl with the Guitar" describe to her blindfolded sister the articles borrowed of the audience.

The Dancing Goddess.*

BY WILLIAM GUTHRIE KELLY.

CYRUS STERLING was traveling representative of an Eastern concern manufacturing microscopes, telescopes, thermometers and barometers for the trade.

The proprietor of a large department store in the Northwest had sent a complaint to his house that out of a great number of their thermometers sold that season a large proportion had, after a few days' use, broken at the bulb. They were of a type used on porches, verandas and similar outdoor places, and all those reported broken had been so exposed, but not in any extreme temperatures, either high or low. In every case the bulb had the appearance of having collapsed on the under side, allowing the mercury to escape.

Mr. Sterling, having other business in that locality, which chanced to be the very place in which the glass tubes of the thermometers were made, resolved to look into the matter. Blame had, of course, been promptly laid upon the manufacturers of the glass bulbs, but it remained to conciliate the merchant.

It was late in the afternoon when Sterling arrived — too late to visit the glass works — but there was time for a short and satisfactory talk with Mr. Palmer, the department store proprietor. In passing from his private office to the outer door Sterling paused at the furnishing goods counter to buy some neckware. With his methodical bachelor ways, he was very deliberate in his selection, till he noticed that all about him the salespeople were covering their goods with huge dust-cloths and bringing out hats and wraps, with ears expectant for the six o'clock gong.

Hastening his choice, he handed a five-dollar bill to the impatient saleswoman. In a moment the whirring cash-carrier made

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* The writer of this story received a cash prize of $100 in THE BLACK CAT story contest ending March 31, 1900.

its last trip and the girl hurriedly handed him his change, a two-dollar bill and a silver dollar. He grasped the note, but the coin, without touching his hand, dropped upon the glass show-case, struck upon its edge, whirled languidly several times, and seemed on the point of falling, when Sterling, as he was about to take it up, noticed that it appeared to rise gradually as it continued revolving. Higher and higher it came at every turn, until it stood straight on its edge, spinning with a steady, even motion — not a rapid whirl — with just sufficient momentum to keep its equilibrium. And there it spun.

Sterling watched it in astonishment, and the salesgirl, pausing in putting on her street clothes, stared a moment and said, superciliously:

"Ah, you're quite a professor of legerdemain!"

Intently regarding the rotating coin, Sterling replied:

"If it's legerdemain you're the professor; you were the last to touch the dollar."

Still the coin spun on, the two stood gazing at it, and Mr. Palmer, emerging from his office, stopped in surprise at the strange scene. Listening to Sterling's story he reflected a moment, and then said:

"I have heard or read that there is thought to be a spot somewhere on earth where all the natural forces — gravitation, attraction, friction, etc. — are neutralized, and that any motion given to an inert object at that point would continue perpetually. But I never knew that any one claimed knowledge of the location of that spot — much less imagined my store to be built over it.

"But if it is" — and his musing look changed to a shrewd, business-like expression — "and that dollar keeps on spinning till noon to-morrow, I've got an advertisement that money couldn't buy. Miss Anderson, you needn't wait, ask the cashier — "

A glance at the cashier's vacant cage and the rapidly emptying store was followed by a change of tone, and putting his hand into his pocket, he added:

"Never mind, I'll give Mr. Sterling another dollar in place of this nimble one."

"Oh, come now, Palmer," said Sterling, "that's my dollar, you know. I think I'll keep it."

"Keep a business interest in it, you mean?" replied the merchant, much disappointed, but clinging tenaciously to the main point.

"Well, I hadn't thought of that; its strange performance makes it a desirable pocket-piece — my capital would always be turning, you know. But since you think it such an attraction, perhaps I'd better 'manage' it, and let it play an engagement at your house for a percentage of the 'gate money.'

Half in jest and half in earnest, this badinage continued till the two men were left alone in the store with the awestruck night watchman, waiting to lock the last door.

And still the dollar spun!

There was neither slackening nor acceleration of its speed, no irregularity in its low hum, now audible in the intense stillness, and the image of the Goddess of Liberty could be occasionally caught, as the deliberate coin flashed in the one light left burning.

The result of the conference was that the watchman, who gave but reluctant aid in placing a temporary railing around the transparent pedestal of the spinning dollar, was strictly enjoined to see that no one disturbed it, and the following announcement was inserted in all the morning papers:

THE DANCING GODDESS!

A cordial Invitation is extended to the Public to visit a

FREE EXHIBITION

Of this Unaccountable Phenomenon at

PALMER'S PANTECHNICON.

It was agreed that Sterling should receive a handsome sum for each day the coin continued to turn, and when it ceased, or the engagement terminated, it was to become his property.

Crowds larger than those of bargain-sale Mondays were at the doors when they were opened in the morning. By noon the Dancing Goddess was drawing a multitude; by night it was the sole talk of the town.

Next day the store was again jammed, and a cordon of policemen no more than sufficed to prevent the surging curiosity-seekers from flattening one another against the stout gas-pipe railing now encircling what had been left standing of the former furnishing goods counter.

Palmer's friends winked, and said he was a clever fellow. His competitors sulked, advertised that they did not run museums, and condemned Pantechnicon methods as thoroughly unbusiness-like.

And still the dollar spun on!

Sterling, having cautioned the glass-factory manager that further breaks in bulbs would mean cancelled orders, and transacted some other business, was now ready to leave town, but did not wish to do so without his marvellous dollar. It now had a strong fascination for him, and he spent the afternoon of the third day watching its tireless twirl.

At closing time Palmer said to him:

"Sterling, this scheme doesn't work! The store is crowded — overrun. But receipts grow less every day. People who come to see the Goddess forget everything else, and those who really come to buy catch the fever and buy less and talk more than if they only came to 'shop.' Let's call the thing off!"

Sterling was anxious to resume his trip, and the Dancing Goddess troubled his conscience. If the manifestation were really supernatural, had he a right to profit by it pecuniarily? What was the meaning of the whole affair? He was not sorry to see it ended, and willingly agreed. Yet he shrank from touching the weird thing. But, having so persistently claimed the coin at first, he could not refuse it now, and extending his hand he caught it rather gingerly between thumb and finger, and laid it flat in the other palm.

Both men gave sighs of relief.

"I don't care to see such a queer thing again," said Palmer.

"Nor I," assented Sterling.

As he stepped from the store into the dusk of evening, a man eagerly followed, and soon blocked his way. The wildness of the man's face, with the uneasy state of Sterling's mind, combined to give him a nervous shock, and before he recovered, the stranger cried with a strong foreign accent:

"Give me my dollar! You have it — it is mine — mine. For it I have worked for years. Here, take this one for it. Quick! Oh, Heaven, quick!"

One hand held a silver dollar and the other was extended in a beseeching attitude. The man did not seem to meditate violence, and Sterling, gathering his wits, remembered that he had seen the wild-eyed stranger foremost in the crowds around the spinning dollar. His clothes were shabby and his face showed starvation and illness. He trembled so that his teeth chattered.

Taking in all this at a glance, Sterling wondered what new turn was about to be given to this remarkable affair. The man leaned nearer to him, speaking hoarsely, but in a calmer manner:

"Listen, and fear me not. You don't know — you don't understand — but I'll tell you all. I fixed that dollar. It's perpetual motion! I tried for years to find it, and now I succeed. I've worked, I've begged, I've starved, I've stolen — I've done everything for it. I had it nearly done a dozen times in other metals, but nothing but silver will do — I've found that out. I finished it — all but its shaft — two weeks ago. Then I worked for enough to buy food to keep me alive until I could finish the shaft. I had my mind so wrapped up in that shaft that — O God! — I gave the wrong dollar at the provision store. I ran back. They laughed at me — they thought me crazy — and put me into the street. Then I *was* crazy. I ran about, looking for every man with a silver dollar, sure that he had mine. Then I passed by here and saw the crowds and went in. There it was, spinning, spinning! My precious model of perpetual motion! But I dared not touch it — I could only watch. The big policeman would call me a thief, and hustle me off, and that would be the end. So I waited and watched, and I know that you have it. It's mine — you must give it to me. Let me show you! I sawed it in two — I broke thermometers to get mercury — let me show you!"

The man's manner and words were so convincing that Sterling handed him the coveted dollar. Clutching it firmly, the excited man skilfully laid it open with his thumb-nail, as one would a watch, and from a series of tortuous channels, grooved in the body of the coin, bright globules of quicksilver coursed and ran from his finger-tips.

"See! did I not say so?" he exclaimed. "But the wheel still needs its shaft, and I may not live to finish it. I am weak and ill from starvation — and something clutches me here."

He drew his hand across his breast, as he had done once or twice before, gasped for breath, and his face grew ashen.

"Twice I have nearly died. If I thought I should go before this is done, I would destroy it. No one but I shall have the glory of the greatest invention of the ages."

Closing his claw-like fingers over the priceless coin, the man suddenly thrust his other dollar into Sterling's hand, and turning, ran blindly with uncertain gait across the street.

For a moment Sterling stood in astonishment. Then, prompted by curiosity and a sudden desire to befriend the unfortunate man, he started in pursuit.

Through obscure and narrow streets and crooked alleys, by the fitful gleam of moonlight, the chase led to the water side, where Sterling rapidly gained upon the panting fugitive, running wearily along a stone causeway.

Suddenly the inventor's feeble feet stumbled and he fell upon his face. The dollar flew from his hand, struck the stone pavement with a silvery ring, and, spinning furiously, whirled away towards the water and disappeared in its sluggish black depths.

With a despairing shriek that sent a thrill through Sterling, the crazed inventor plunged after the Dancing Goddess, to whose worship his life was vowed and who now claimed the sacrifice.

As he sank, the moon emerged once more and cast its bright beams upon a chaplet of bubbles as silvery as the drops of mercury that had streamed from his livid fingers.

The Story of The Black Cat

By Its Founder and Publisher

When, nearly five years ago, the first number of The Black Cat appeared, it contained neither promise nor prospectus. The time-honored list of distinguished contributors was not in evidence; the customary prophecy, even — that a long-felt want was about to be filled — found no place in its pages. The magazine was from the very outset offered solely upon its merits — in contents and cost, in matter and make-up, it should tell its own story. How that story was received is best expressed by a sworn circulation exceeding 120,000 copies per issue. How The Black Cat came to be established, however, what obstacles and prejudices its complete departure from beaten paths encountered — that forms another story, which at this time, when it is about to enter upon its sixth year, may prove of interest.

A dozen years ago, when the ten-cent magazine was yet unknown, and when the cost of production had declined to a point that rendered the advent of such popular priced periodicals no longer a question of possibility, but merely one of time, the undersigned proposed to a number of New England business men and capitalists the establishment in Boston of a ten-cent magazine of original fiction that should mark a new departure, not only in price, but in other important respects — in matter and methods as well. The proposal met with no favor — the chief objection urged being the objection the man with a really new idea usually encounters. "If a market existed for such a periodical why hadn't other publishers seized the opportunity? If a really good magazine could profitably be produced and sold in large editions at ten cents, why did the publishers of the Atlantic and Harper's charge 35 cents? If the serial story was, as a matter of fact, giving a large majority of the present-day people a pain in the side, why didn't publishers and authors cut it short? If there really were men and women — other than those whose names had become household words — who could tell in good English clever, fascinating stories, why didn't we hear of them? And if many intelligent people really read a story, not with a view to ascertaining whether its author is a perfect lady or a dyspeptic gentleman, but read it because of its merits as a story — if all this be true, well, what was the matter with 35-cent magazines, anyway — their editors surely received hundreds of clever short stories? What did the editors do with them?" Well — the result was that the writer put off the project to a time when he should be able, without outside capital, to carry it into effect. As, during the following few years, one ten-cent magazine after another made its appearance, he concluded in 1895, when he was finally ready to launch his enterprise, to go still further on the road of popular prices, and the result was The Black Cat at five cents. Even then the lithographers of whom the earlier covers were ordered pronounced the printing of editions of 100,000 suicidal. The news companies shook their heads and prophesied failure — people might buy ten thousand copies once to satisfy their curiosity, but the thing couldn't last — there were already too many story publications. Sage advertisers, although confronted by the fact that one and two-cent dailies, which had revolutionized the newspaper business, ranked among the most profitable mediums, insisted that a monthly magazine of original short stories, at five cents,

DISCREPANCY IN PRINT

would simply appeal to five-cent people. When, month after month, the sort of "five-cent people" who are at the head of libraries, literary clubs and colleges kept right on satisfying their curiosity — when annual subscriptions by the thousand came from these, from professional men and women, and from homes where quality and merit, not quantity or price, regulate purchases — when news companies throughout America each sent standing orders for 5,000, 10,000 and 15,000 copies—when the foremost newspapers in England and America stole its copyrighted stories — then came the imitators, here, there, everywhere! And everyone, knowing that sharpers do not imitate failures, acknowledged the success of The Black Cat! And while it continued to meet with increased success, its imitators continued to meet with increased failure, for the very good reason that, although in make-up they closely resembled The Black Cat, they differed from it in matter just as the counterfeit differs from the genuine. To pick up, borrow, or steal five stories and offer them for five cents was one thing; to find people who would buy them was another thing. By adopting a course that appealed as just, fair, generous and business-like to writers, The Black Cat secured contributions that at once appealed to readers. By judging stories solely upon their merits, without reference to the name or reputation of writers; by paying, not according to length, but according to strength; by saying to authors who knocked for admission, not "You have the right to send us a story, but there all your rights terminate; we pay what we please, how we please, and when we please — that 's literature!" but saying, instead, "Send your story; if available, we will name our price; if that price is satisfactory to you we will accept the story and pay at once on acceptance; that 's business, for we know of no good reason why the rule that governs the buying and selling of the product of brawn — whereby, the world over, the producer, alike with the purchaser, has a voice in the fixing of price and terms — why this rule should not apply in the buying and selling of the product of brain;" by paying a higher price for short stories than was ever paid before, and by making every number of The Black Cat complete in itself, so that the reader would n't have to wait six months or a year before learning whether the hero was finally accepted or died cured —, by doing these things The Black Cat did what appealed alike to the capable writer and the discriminating reader.

And as to the advertiser, the limit of sixteen pages originally fixed for announcements has been twice extended, and the last Holiday issue contained forty-nine pages of advertising. This increase is due to the fact that while there are houses that — like the political hero that continues to religiously cast his vote for Andrew Jackson for the presidency — still include Godey's Lady's Book and Peterson's Magazine in their annual selection of mediums, there is that majority whose judgment and experience have amply demonstrated that every number of The Black Cat has a permanent value for its hundreds of thousands of readers, and consequently a permanent value for its advertisers possessed by no other magazine.

No one will deny the importance of the bigger, bulkier, costlier magazine of to-day that deals elaborately, learnedly and picturesquely with fiction, poetry, science and timely topics, but in its distinctive field The Black Cat, judged by its record, has made and fills an enviable place of its own. While its success is naturally a source of pride to its founder, that pride is subordinate to the feeling of gratitude for the encouragement and support his undertaking has, from the outset, received.

H. D. Umbstætter.